



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE HIGH SCHOOL JOURNAL

Volume II

CHAPEL HILL, N. C., APRIL, 1919

Number 4

## THE TEACHING OF VIRGIL

By MISS MAUDE H. UPCHURCH  
Head of the Department of Latin, Asheville High School

I salute thee, Mantovano,  
I that loved thee since my day began,  
Wielder of the stateliest measure ever moulded by the lips  
of man. —Tennyson.

IT is estimated that the mortality rate in the Latin department of the average high school is around eighty per cent. Does it not seem a pity that boys and girls should agonize (I use the word advisedly), over the difficulties of Latin syntax in grammar and Cæsar only to become so discouraged or disgusted that they can not be induced either by parental persuasion or pedagogical advice to continue the last two years of high school Latin to completion?

For Virgil is the "crème de la crème" of the whole four years' course and ought to be interesting and attractive enough to lure on the most discouraged of pupils.

My purpose in writing this article is to state some of the ways in which I think this can be done; if not the ways in which it may serve as a lure to others, at least that those who have persevered may be rewarded for their effort in a most interesting way.

### TEACH VIRGIL AS YOU WOULD AN ENGLISH CLASSIC

I believe the way in which this may be accomplished is by forgetting for the while that we are translating from another language into our own and proceeding to teach Virgil as we would teach any English classic—Shakespeare, Milton, Arnold. The real end—in teaching Virgil—is not to secure a perfect translation into English, but to present the subject-matter, the *thought* of the poem. In the past we have had too much stress laid on the ability to translate, and not enough on what the passage means to the pupil after it is translated. I heard, not long since, a high school teacher of English say that when she read Virgil she had no idea there was a story to it. And a bright high school girl, having already read twenty-seven chapters of Cæsar, revealed to me that she knew no more of the geography of Gaul than of South Africa and never dreamed that ancient Gaul had any connection with modern France.

When we come to the teaching of Virgil let us get

to the heart of it. Let our chief aim be to teach the thought, the ideas, and not so many examples of indirect discourse, ablative absolute, or contrary-to-fact conditions. About these, you recall, the pupil has been hearing for three whole years. I would not say that a rule of syntax should never be asked in the *Aeneid*. But I do say syntax should be subordinated, and often lessons in composition can well be put in two or three times a month.

Syntax and composition should be made secondary and wholly subservient to the main purpose—the presentation of the *Aeneid* as the masterpiece of a master mind—the perfect portrayal, if you please, of a human life, its effort and its crowning results in the person of the "pius Aeneas." The "pius Aeneas" escaped from the burning city, wandering "around all the seas," undergoing trials and sorrow, and finally settling in Italy, having kept ever before him the vision of the Rome that was to be epitomized in Book VI, lines 847-853.

Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera,  
Credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore volutus,  
Orabunt causas melius caelique meatus  
Describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent;  
Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento;  
Haec tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem,  
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos.<sup>1</sup>

Nor storms, nor plagues, nor harpies, nor Scylla and Charybdis, nor the clinging arms of a love-mad woman could keep our hero from his destiny. Though in many ways he fails to measure up to our modern ideas of a hero, we know that he must be judged in that respect by standards of Virgil's day, not ours. Yet withal, one must read far to find a more nearly perfect portrayal of a man with a vision.

The very language of the Mantuan is in such de-

<sup>1</sup> I doubt not others will forge the bronze with softer touch, will draw from the marble living likenesses, will plead the law case more eloquently, map out by rule the courses of the constellations in the heavens, and tell of the rising stars. But you, O Roman, remember 'tis yours to rule the peoples of earth with imperial sway; that will be your accomplishment; to proclaim the ways of peace; to spare the conquered but beat down the proud. (Free translation by G. K. G. Henry.)

lightful contrast to the pure classic phrasing of Cæsar's military campaigns, and to Cicero's fluent oratory, filled with political allusions. One knows in reading the *Aeneid*, without having heard of his *Eclogues* and *Bucolics*, that Virgil loved nature with a genuine understanding of her rivers and birds and bees. Can you imagine any other giving us that wonderful Homeric simile of the toiling Carthaginians (Book I, lines 430-436), than one who knew the habits and minutest life of the busy bee?

Qualis apes aestate nova per florea rura  
Exercet sub sole labor, cum gentis adultos  
Educunt fetus, aut cum liquentia mella  
Stipunt et dulci distendunt nectare cellas  
Aut onera accipunt venientum aut agmine facto  
Ignavum fucos pecus a praesaepibus arcent;  
Fervet opus, redolentque thymo fragrantia mella.<sup>2</sup>

Can you imagine any other describing with such accuracy of detail the toil of the ant, or the slimy, hissing snake (Book II, lines 473-475), which winter's cold has hidden away and which spring's first warm days bring across one's path?

Nunc positus novus exuviis nitidusque iuventa  
Lubrica convolvit sublato pectore terga  
Arduus ad solem, et linguis micat ore trisculces.<sup>3</sup>

Can you imagine any other describing Hecuba and her daughters-in-law hovering around the altar of the Penates like doves (Book II, line 516), at the approach of a storm—"praecipites atra cen tempestate columbae"? (Like doves in consternation at the black storm.)

Lastly, can you picture any other than one who knew and loved so well the tiniest field mouse or hare—"wee timorous beasties"? Can you imagine any other portraying an enraged mob attentive to the words of some sensible man as "arrectis auribus"—with pricked-up ears?

#### OCCASIONAL USE OF STANDARD TRANSLATIONS

It is an exceedingly interesting exercise, and helpful as well, occasionally to put upon the board and have the class to copy the elegant English translations of some of the more striking passages of the *Aeneid*, to be memorized in some instances, and again to be used for the purpose of comparing them with the

<sup>2</sup> Such labor is theirs as employs the bees on a sunny day in the early summer amid the flowers of the countryside, when they lead out the newly grown swarms or pack the liquid honey and fill the comb to breaking with the sweet nectar; or take the burdens of those returning heward, or, making a real battle line, beat back from the hives the idle herd of drones. The project is all alive, and the fragrant and abundant honey is redolent of thyme.

<sup>3</sup> His old skin laid aside, shining resplendent in youth, his coiling back all bright, eager for the sun he comes, his mouth aquiver with forked tongues.

pupils' own translations and with each other. The translations by Dryden, by Conington, and by Sir Charles Bowen may be used to good advantage for this purpose. Take, for example, the translations of the three longer passages quoted above. Compare them with the free prose translations given in the footnotes. Have the pupils compare their own translations with these. Have them note the poet's fidelity to the original in thought and word, (and the freedom he has taken), his diction, meter, and stateliness of phrase. Have them try to substitute synonyms, preserving the meter if possible, to see if by the choice of different words the passage can be improved. Then have them take other passages and render them into as good verse as they can.

Here is Dryden's translation of the first passage:

Such is their toil, and such their busy pains,  
As exercise the bees in flow'ry plains,  
When winter is past, and summer scarce begun,  
Invites them forth to labour in the sun:  
Some lead their youth abroad, while some condense  
Their liquid store, and some in cells dispense,  
Some at the gate stand ready to receive  
The golden burden, and their friends relieve,  
All with united force combine to drive  
The lazy drones from the laborious hive;  
With envy stung, they view each other's deeds;  
The fragrant work with diligence proceeds.

The following rendering of the second passage quoted above is from the translation of Sir Charles Bowen:

Others will mould their bronzes to breath with a tender grace,  
Draw, I doubt not, from marble a vivid life from the face,  
Plead at the bar more deftly, with sapient wands of the wise,  
Trace heaven's courses and changes, predict us stars to arise,  
Thine, O Roman, remember, to reign over every race!  
These be thine arts, thy glories, the ways of peace proclaim,  
Mercy to show to the fallen, the proud with battle to tame!

Let us look at the third passage, again taken from Dryden's translation:

So shines in youth, the crested snake,  
Who slept the winter in a thorny brake;  
And casting off his slough, when spring returns,  
Now looks aloft, and with new glory burns.

It is hardly necessary to add that this type of exercise can be easily overdone. It should, as a matter of fact, be used sparingly. Yet in the hands of a capable teacher, it can be used to excellent purpose occasionally. If skilfully used, it will not only quicken the pupil's interest in the *Aeneid*; it will stimulate his imagination as well.

#### THE USE OF ENGLISH PARALLELS

Then too, kindred ideas in English classics should be constantly kept in mind and presented to the class in

Virgil. For instance, it is interesting where Virgil's definition of sleep is met with—"dona gratissima divum"—to have the pupil learn in this connection Shakespeare's lines:

Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore Labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast;

or Wordsworth's lines:

Come, blessed barrier between day and day,  
Dear mother of fresh thoughts and joyous health!

Nowhere is the story of the discord of Peleus' banquet-hall, and the events leading up to the Trojan war, told more graphically than in Tennyson's *Oenone*—beautiful Oenone, bereft of her Paris, who has deserted her to be "umpire to the gods." Note these lines at the close of the poem after the pupil has learned thoroughly Pallas' definition of true power:

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.  
Yet not for power (power of herself  
Would come uncalled for) but to live by law,  
Acting the law we live by without fear;  
And because right is right to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

At the close comes that pathetic touch of woman-kind seeking solace in the words:

\* \* \* I will rise and go  
Down into Troy, ere the stars come forth and  
Talk with the wild Cassandra for she says  
A fire dances before her, and the sound  
Rings ever in her ears of armed men.

What more naturally presents itself when the pupil meets with the story of Orpheus in Book VII than that Milton's references to Orpheus and his music in his *L'Allegro* and *II Penseroso* should be learned?

Untwisting all the chains that tie the hidden soul of harmony;  
That Orpheus' self may heave his head,  
From golden slumber on a bed  
Of heap'd Elysian flowers, and hear  
Such strains as would have won the ear,  
Of Pluto quite set free  
His half-regained Eurydice. (*L'Allegro*.)

Bid the soul of Orpheus sing  
Such notes as, warbled to the string,  
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,  
And made Hell grant what love did seek! (*II Penseroso*.)

Such references as I have mentioned constantly present themselves. Every student of Virgil should begin the course by memorizing Tennyson's *To Virgil*; and at the beginning of Book II, Tennyson's *Ulysses* should be committed to memory. No memory work I have ever assigned appeals to the sentiment of the boy in the class more than *Ulysses*. Arnold's *Palladium* presents a meaning of the image and story not acquired by merely translating.

Nowhere can one get a more sympathetic understanding of Spartan Helen than in Tennyson's *Dream of Fair Women*—"a daughter of the gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair." It requires little comment for the pupil to picture well the hatred and scorn of Iphigenia as she stands drawing her robes aside that she may not so much as touch "the hated creature," and saying, "My youth was blighted with a curse. This woman was the cause!" And the pathos of Helen's words, "No one can be more wise than destiny . . . where'er I came, I brought calamity," makes one almost willing to forgive her anything, only to get a different conception of her guilt as we see her resorting to woman's wiles to win back the favor of Menelaus in Landor's *Helen and Menelaus*, "vamping" him, as one worldly-wise youth in my class once expressed it.

In connection with the Sixth Book a reading of Book XI of the *Odyssey* (any good translation) should be required. Also a general knowledge of the meaning, style and composition of Dante's *Inferno*, should be required, thus enabling the pupil to draw comparisons and to see the points of similarity in the great apocalyptic writers of all ages, and also to understand the debt Rome owed to Greece, and that Dante in turn owed to both.

#### VERSIFICATION

I have purposely left a discussion of the versification of the *Aeneid* for the last point to be considered. Teachers of English seems to disregard prosody in English poetry. I seldom have a fourth-year student come to my Virgil class who has ever heard of a *dactylic hexameter*, to say nothing of an *iambus* or *trochaic pentameter*. I would like to see something written on this. I should like to know how much stress other teachers of Virgil are laying on versification and how they obtain the best results. So far, the only method I have employed has been to have a few lines of almost every lesson scanned orally or written out. I find that the pupil thus gradually acquires a metrical knowledge of the *Aeneid*. I certainly do not agree with Professor Johnson, of the University of Indiana, that time spent on versification and the study of the poetical usage in Virgil is time lost.

Far too few pupils ever meet with the meter of Horace or Terence to warrant a high school teacher's taking up so much time with the versification of the *Aeneid*. To a large majority of the class it is not "an introduction to the study of Latin poetry," but a finishing of their experience in reading Latin. To lay too much stress on the metrical mechanism, like stressing the grammatical composition, would utterly defeat one's purpose in illuminating the thought and discerning the beauty of the *Aeneid*.